



News from

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## The Future of Energy in Biomass

By Congressman Ron Kind

The United States Senate is now considering national energy legislation that is only slightly better than the disappointing bill the House passed in April. Neither piece of legislation lays out a serious, long-term strategy for moving our country away from its shaky dependence on foreign sources of oil. Instead, both bills focus on shoveling billions in taxpayer-funded subsidies to big oil companies in the vain hope of drilling our way out of the current crisis. But even if we drilled in every pristine wilderness currently held in trust for future generations of Americans – either as a park, national wildlife refuge, or coastal sea floor – we would not even come close to meeting our current fossil fuel demands.

As I travel around western Wisconsin and listen to the people I meet, I am struck by a growing awareness and concern that the U.S. reliance on fossil fuels is not sustainable and potentially has serious security, environmental, and economic consequences. I believe it is time our nation commits itself to kicking the fossil energy import habit by replacing Middle East oil with Midwest grain and other “home grown” renewable alternatives such as biomass.

Biomass resources – organic material available on a renewable or recurring basis – are not only in great supply but offer vast environmental, economic, and national security benefits from reducing greenhouse gas emissions to weaning the U.S. from our dependence on foreign oil. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, biomass is the second-most utilized resource for renewable power generation in the U.S., but we have yet to harness the great potential of this resource to meet our country’s vast energy needs.

Nowhere is the potential for alternative biomass fuels as clearly evident as with ethanol. Cars and trucks that run with E-85 (85% ethanol, 15% gasoline blend) flexible-fuel are now being sold in significant numbers each year by major automakers. Unfortunately, there are currently only 200 E-85 fuel stations that exist in the U.S. Recently, I proposed that the federal government assist in the development of this ethanol fuel infrastructure and sent a letter to the House Appropriations Committee calling for \$2 million go toward efforts to expand E-85 refueling capacity. Unfortunately, the House appropriation bill ultimately approved only one-fourth of that request.

What actions like this demonstrate is a lack of a visionary federal policy that utilizes renewable energy sources and biomass alternatives to achieve greater energy security, a cleaner environment, and a stronger rural America. Our nation can and must take the steps necessary to transfer itself from one that relies mainly upon fossil fuels to one that is bio-based. Until then, some of our greatest energy sources will continue to go untapped in agricultural fields all across the country, our dependence on foreign oil will continue, and responsible energy policy will be a thing of the past.